

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 699

By Kernell

A RESOLUTION commending Nate Lenow, Jr., Howard Thacker, and Gary Lehman on the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Food Stamp Fraud Hearings in Shelby County.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this General Assembly should pause to specially recognize those citizens whose courageous actions helped bring about changes for the public good; and

WHEREAS, three such citizens are Nate Lenow, Jr., Howard Thacker, and Gary Lehman, whose efforts thirty years ago led to a dramatic reduction in food stamp fraud and the passage of important legislation protecting State employees from unfair retaliation; and

WHEREAS, on March 19, 1977, Mr. Lenow and Mr. Thacker, two Shelby County food stamp eligibility workers, gave a presentation on their findings regarding food stamp fraud to a special public meeting of a subcommittee of the Tennessee General Assembly's Finance, Ways and Means Committee in Shelby County; and

WHEREAS, a month before, the two men's fraud unit had been disbanded, the official reason being that it was unproductive; Mr. Lenow, Mr. Thacker, and their co-worker Gary Lehman bravely went to politicians and the press to protest the decision and announced that they had uncovered seven Memphis food stamp fraud rings which had cost State government \$207,000; and

WHEREAS, their courage would prove to endanger their jobs; in subsequent weeks, these men faced reassignments, the shunning of other employees and administrators in their department, reprimands for minor offenses, and the loss of a departmental grant for Mr. Lenow; and

WHEREAS, despite any short-term losses for Mr. Lenow, Mr. Thacker, and Mr. Lehman, including their resignations from their jobs, their revelations resulted in great long-term

improvements for welfare reform; since 1977, there have been many convictions for food stamp fraud by the Tennessee Department of Human Services, which has also publicly acknowledged information that supports these men's allegations of the rampancy of food stamp fraud in Shelby County during that era; and

WHEREAS, another significant effect of the heroic actions of these three men was the passing of a law by the General Assembly protecting State employees from retaliation by State agencies, the so-called Whistleblower Protection Act; and

WHEREAS, through their conscientious decision to expose injustice even when it meant personal sacrifices, Nate Lenow, Howard Thacker, and Gary Lehman exemplified the noble precepts of public service that have earned Tennessee recognition as the "Volunteer State," and they should be specially recognized; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED FIFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we hereby honor Nate Lenow, Jr., Howard Thacker, and Gary Lehman for their heroic efforts on behalf of exposing food stamp fraud and commend their courageous actions and personal sacrifice on the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Food Stamp Fraud Hearings in Shelby County.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.